

Princeton High School history department prepares proposal for new
classes 2017-2018

Mark Shelley, recently appointed as the new humanities supervisor at PHS, aims to make significant progress with the English and history departments by making learning at PHS more project-based and interdisciplinary.

Striving toward this goal, Shelley and other PHS teachers are currently drafting proposals of new history classes to add to the 2017-2018 curriculum. Shelley states that this has been something many history teachers have been wanting to do for a while now.

"I have a lot more familiarity with the social studies curriculum. In that regard, it's getting to know the individual approaches to each teacher. For English it's a higher learning curve for me. I think any good leader spends the first year trying to do some things they think are important as an educator," Shelley said.

Additionally, some teachers feel that these proposed courses resemble what students truly want to learn about in school.

"I wouldn't consider PHS to be a traditional school: We're pretty forward thinking and progressive. We try to go with ideas that we think would be more beneficial to students. These potential new classes, I think, reflect more [positively on] the students," said Timothy Campbell, a history teacher at PHS.

In order to gather data about points of interest for PHS students, the history department conducted a survey in June. The survey asked students to choose the most interesting courses out of a range of several classes. The top three most popular classes were Contemporary Crises and Current Events, World Religions, as well as Revolution and Social Change.

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photo by [Aaron Wu](#)

Based on the results from the survey, Shelley began writing a proposal over the summer to institute the new courses.

"The idea was that we would propose [the new courses] to go into the program of studies for next year, so my understanding is that [the Board approval] will happen in November or December. There are a lot of questions that have to be decided on in order to make a formal proposal," Shelley said.

Among the questions that need to be considered for the proposal are what grade levels the courses will be open to, whether the classes will be textbook-based, and whether or not the classes will be full-year or semester courses.

If the Board approves the history department's proposals, students will be able to register for the courses in the winter of 2017-2018 school year.

Shelley, as well as other PHS history teachers, hope that the proposed courses will allow students to expand their knowledge of the current world.

"I think with Contemporary Crises and Current Events, plus World Religions, they will address the desires of students to learn more about the contemporary world and not just the past.

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[Teachers won't be] constrained by an outside curriculum. They have a creative opportunity to work with their students," Shelley said.

"I think students will enjoy the new classes. I'm always so impressed with our student body—the things they do and how many experiences they have," said Rick Miller, a history teacher. "This will give them more chances to express their ideas, [and] to develop their thoughts before they leave high school and go into the world."

Members of the student body agree with Shelley and fellow PHS history teachers. They feel that the modern topics of these proposed courses will give them a spectrum of learning opportunities.

"I feel like [these classes] would be necessary because our world is developing at such a rapid pace with the LGBTQIA and feminist movements, and I feel like these courses would really open up people to all different topics," said Tiffany Huang '19.

"I think that [the new classes] will enrich my education opportunities because those subjects are things I'm interested in, and I think that if I'm more interested in the classes, I'll learn more," said Amy Huang '19.

History teachers expressed their interest in teaching courses that are relevant to current society as well.

"I do remember the idea of something on the survey talking about race. I find that to be a really pressing issue, so any type of course that would revolve around race would be most meaningful to me," said Patricia Manhart, a history teacher.

Shelley remains open to the idea of adding new classes to the curriculum after this year. However, he would first like to examine the effects of the pending classes on the next school year.

"Adding two semesters is a big step already. We'll see how those go and then we'll take a step back and look at the overall program," Shelley said.

"[The new courses] might be non-traditional for the high school, but we still find them just as fulfilling and maybe more on a collegiate level course," Manhart said. "If it gives the students the opportunity to explore their interests in greater depth or start prepping for that next level of history beyond just the classic US I, US II, World History, then it's absolutely necessary."